

DE VILMARTE'S LUCK¹

By MARY HEATON VORSE

From Harper's Magazine

WHAT Hazelton's friends called his second manner had for a mother despair, and for a father irony, and for a godmother necessity. It leaped into his mind full-grown, charged with the vitality of his bitterness.

Success had always been scratching at Hazelton's door, and then hurrying past. The world had always been saying to him, "Very well, very well indeed; just a little bit better and you shall have the recognition that should be yours." Patrons came and almost bought pictures. He was accepted only to be hung so badly that his singing color was lost on the sky-line. Critics would infuriate him by telling him that he had almost—*almost*, mind you—painted the impossible; that his painting was what they called "a little too blond."

How Hazelton hated that insincere phrase which meant nothing, for, as he explained to Dumont the critic, as they sat outside the Café de la Rotonde after their return from the *Salon*, Nature was blond—what else? He, Dumont, came from the Midi, didn't he? Well, then, he knew what sunshine was! How could paint equal the color of a summer's day, the sun shining on the flesh of a blond woman, a white dress against a white wall? Blond? Because he loved the vitality of light they wanted him to dip his brush in an ink-pot—*hein?* Dumont would be pleased if he harked back to the gloom of the old Dutch school, or if he imitated the massed insincerities of Boecklen, Hazelton opined from the depths of his scorn.

Dumont poised himself for flight on the edge of his

¹ Copyright, 1918, by Harper and Brothers. Copyright, 1919, by Mary Heaton O'Brien.

hard metal chair. He was bored, but he had to admit that if ever Hazelton was justified in bitterness it was to-day when, after a long search through the miles of canvases, he had finally discovered his two pictures hung in such a position as to be as effective as two white spots. He escaped, leaving Hazelton hunched over the table, his forceful, pugnacious, red countenance contrasting oddly with the subtle anemia of his absinthe. He was followed by Hazelton's choleric shouts, which informed him that he, Hazelton, could paint with mud for a medium if he chose.

His profession of art critic had accustomed Dumont to the difficulties of the artistic temperament, and he thought no more of Hazelton until he ran into him some ten days later. There was malice in Hazelton's small, brilliant eyes, and an air of suppressed triumph in his muscular deep-chested figure. His face was red, partly from living out of doors and partly from drink. He rolled as he walked, not quite like a bear and not quite like a seafaring man—a vigorous, pugnacious person whose vehement greeting made Dumont apprehensive until he glanced at Hazelton's hands, which were reassuringly small.

"Well," he said, "you remember our conversation? It was the parent, my dear Dumont, of dead-sea fruit of the most mature variety." Hazelton considered this a joke, and laughed at it with satisfaction. He was very much pleased with himself.

Dumont went with Hazelton to his studio. On Hazelton's easel was a picture of dark, wind-swept trees beaten by a storm. They silhouetted themselves against a sinister and menacing sky. The thing was full of violence and fury, it was drenched with wet and blown with wind.

"Who did this?" asked Dumont. "It is magnificent!"

"You *like* it?" asked Hazelton, incredulously. And then he repeated himself, changing his accent, "*You* like it, Dumont?"

"Certainly I like it," Dumont answered, a trifle stiffly. "There is vitality, form, color! Because you are not happy unless you are in the midst of a sunbath, at least permit others to vary their moods."

At this Hazelton burst into loud laughter.

"You amuse yourself," Dumont observed, but Hazelton continued to laugh uproariously, shaking his wide shoulders.

"Do you know the name of that picture? The name of that picture is '*La Guigne Noire*'—I painted it from the depths of my bad luck."

"*Hein?*" said Dumont. "*You* painted that picture?"

"This picture—if you call it that—I painted."

"I call it a picture," Dumont asserted, dryly.

"I call it a practical joke," said Hazelton. "One does not paint pictures with the tongue in one's cheek. I know how one paints pictures."

"How one paints pictures makes no difference," Dumont replied, impatiently. "Who cares if you had your tongue in your cheek? You had your brush in your hand. The result is that which matters. This work has completeness."

Hazelton slapped his thigh with a mighty blow. "Mon Dieu!" he cried. "If this fools you, there are others it will fool as well—and I need the money! And from that bubbling artesian well from which this sprang I can see a million others like it—like it, but not like it. *Hein, mon vieux?* Come, come, my child, to Mercier's, who will sell it for me. The day of glory has arrived!"

A sardonic malice sparkled on Hazelton's ugly face, and his nose, which jutted out with a sudden truculency, was redder than ever. He took the picture up and danced solemnly around the studio.

It was in this indecorous fashion, to the echo of Hazelton's bitter laughter, that his second manner was born, and that he achieved his first success, for his second manner was approved by the public.

Three years went past. Hazelton was medaled. He was well hung now, he sold moderately, but he never sold the work which he respected. At last his constant failure with what he called "his own pictures" had made him so sensitive that he no longer exposed them.

Hazelton's position was that of the parent in the old-fashioned fairy tale who had two children, one beautiful and dark-haired, whom he despised and ill-treated and

made work that the child of light might thrive. That, in his good-tempered moments, was how he explained the matter to his friends.

Dumont explained to Hazelton that he had two personalities and that he had no cause to be ashamed of this second and subjective one, even though he had discovered it by chance and in a moment of mockery.

"You have an artistic integrity that is proof even against yourself," was his analysis.

The insistence of the public and of Dumont, in whose critical judgment he had believed, gave him something like respect for his foster-child. His belief in his judgment was subtly undermined.

"I shall leave you," he told Dumont. "I shall secrete myself in the country undefiled by the artist's paintbrush and there I will paint a *chef d'œuvre* entitled 'Le Mal du Ventre.' On its proceeds I will return to my blond."

While engaged on this work, which later became Hazelton's most successful picture, Hazelton met Raoul de Vilmarte. This young man was a poor painter, but a delightful companion, and he endeared himself to Hazelton at once by his naïve enthusiasm for Hazelton's former pictures.

"What grace they had — what beauty — what light! What an extraordinary irony that you should throw away a gift that I should so have cherished!" he exclaimed.

His words were to Hazelton like rain to a dying plant. He stopped work on "Le Mal du Ventre," and began to paint to "suit himself" again. He had a childish delight in surprising De Vilmarte with his new picture.

"Why, why," cried his new friend, "do you permit yourself to bury this supreme talent? No one has painted sunlight as well! Compared with this, darkness enshrouds the canvases of all other masters! Why do you not claim your position as the apostle of light?"

Hazelton explained that critics and the public had forced these canvases into obscurity.

"Another name signed to them — a Frenchman preferably — and we might hear a different story," he added.

A sudden idea came to De Vilmarte. "Listen!" he

said. "I have exposed nothing for two years. Indeed, I have been doubtful as to whether I should expose again. I know well enough that were my family unknown and were not certain members of the jury my masters, and others friends of my family, I might never have been accepted at all—it has been a sensitive point with me. Unfortunately, my mother and my friends believe me to be a genius—"

"Well?" said Hazelton, seeing some plan moving darkly through De Vilmarte's talk.

"Well," said De Vilmarte, slowly, "we might play a joke upon the critics of France. There is a gap between this and my work—immeasurable—one I could never bridge—and yet it is plausible—" He glanced from a sketch of his he was carrying to Hazelton's picture.

Hazelton looked from one to the other. Compared, a gulf was there, fixed, unbridgable, and yet— He twisted his small, nervous hands together. Malice sparkled from his eyes.

"It is plausible!" he agreed. He held out his hand. A sparkle of his malice gleamed in De Vilmarte's pale eyes. They said no more. They shook hands. Later it seemed to Hazelton the ultimate irony that they should have entered into their sinister alliance with levity.

The second phase of the joke seemed as little menacing. You can imagine the three of them outside the Rotonde, Hazelton and De Vilmarte listening to Dumont's praise of De Vilmarte's picture. You can enter into the feelings of cynicism, of disillusion, that filled the hearts of the two *farceurs*. De Vilmarte's picture had been accepted, hung well, then medaled. The critics had acclaimed him!

They sat there delicately baiting Dumont, bound together by the knowledge that they had against the world—for they, and they alone, knew the stuff of which fame is made. They were in the position of the pessimist who has proof of his pessimism. No one really believes the world as bad as he pretends, and here De Vilmarte and Hazelton had proof of their most ignoble suspicions; here was the corroding knowledge that Raoul's position and popularity could achieve the recognition denied to an

unknown man. He was French, and on the inside, and Hazelton was a foreigner and on the outside.

"Well," said Raoul, when Dumont had left them, "we have a fine *gaffe* to spring on them, *hein?* It's going to cost me something. My mother is charmed — she will take it rather badly, I am afraid."

"Well, why should she take it?" asked Hazelton, after a pause. "Why should we share our joke with all the world?"

"You mean?" asked Raoul.

It was then that the voice of fate spoke through Hazelton.

"You can have the picture," he said, jerking his big head impatiently.

"Do you mean that I can have it — to keep?"

"Have it if you like. Money and what money buys is all I want from now on," said Hazelton, and he shook his shoulders grossly and sensually while his nervous hands, the hands whose work the picture was, twisted themselves as though in agonized protest.

Hazelton went back to his studio and stood before his blond pictures, the children of his heart. It was already evening, but they shone out in the dim light. He was a little tipsy.

"So," he said to them — "so all these years you have deceived me, as many a man has been deceived before by his beloved. Your flaunting smiles made me think you were what you are not. Dumont was right — my foster-child is better than you, for she made her way alone and without favor. I tried to think I had painted the impossible. Light is beyond me. Why should I think I could paint light? I am a child of darkness and misfortune. I know who my beloved is. You shall no longer work to support your sister!"

"What are you doing?" came his wife's querulous voice. "Talking and mumbling to yourself before your pictures in the dark? Are you drunk again?"

Some months passed before De VilmarTE and Hazelton met again. They ran into each other on the corner of the Boulevard Raspail and the Boulevard du Montparnasse.

"Hey! What are you doing so far from home?" cried Hazelton.

"Looking for you."

"I was going to you," Hazelton acknowledged.

They stared at each other scrutinizingly, each measuring the other with dawning distrust. Each waited.

"Let us go to the Rotonde," Hazelton suggested.

They talked of other things, each waiting for the other to begin. Hazelton had the most resistance; he had flipped a penny as to whether he should go to seek De Vilmarte, but De Vilmarte had made his decision with anguish. It was he who finally said:

"You know—about the matter of the picture—my mother is quite frantic about my success. She is failing—"

"*Toc!*" cried Hazelton. "My poor wife has to go to the hospital."

"Nothing to do, I know," said De Vilmarte, looking away diffidently, "but for one's mother—"

"But for one's wife," Hazelton capped him, genially. "An aged mother and a sick wife, and a joke on the world shared between two friends— What will a man not do for his sick wife and for his aged mother!"

A little shiver of cold disgust ran over Raoul. For the first time he felt a vague antipathy for Hazelton, his neck was so short and he rolled his big head in such a preposterous fashion.

They said good-by, Hazelton's swagger, De Vilmarte's averted eyes betraying their guilty knowledge that they had bought and sold things that should not be for sale.

Just how it came to be a settled affair neither De Vilmarte nor Hazelton could have told. Now an exhibition occurred for which De Vilmarte needed a picture; now Hazelton dogged by his need of money would come to him. Hazelton's wife was always ailing. Her beauty and her disposition had been undermined by ill-health and self-indulgence, and he was one of those men temperamentally in debt and always on the edge of being sued or dispossessed.

But in Hazelton's brain a fantastic and mad sense of rivalry grew. He had transferred his affection to his

darker mood. Every notice of De Vilmarte's name rankled in his mind. De Vilmarte's growing vogue infuriated him. He felt that he must wring from the critics and the public the recognition that was his due so that this child of his, born of his irony and his despair, and that had been so faithful to him in spite of abuse, might be crowned. Just what had happened to both of them they realized after the opening of the *Salon* next year.

"Take care," Hazelton had warned De Vilmarte, "that they do not hang you better than they do me. That I will not have." He had said it jokingly; but while De Vilmarte's exhibit was massed, and he had won the second medal, Hazelton's was scattered, and he had but one picture on the line; worse still, the critics gave Hazelton formal praise while they acclaimed De Vilmarte as the most promising of the younger school of landscape-painters.

De Vilmarte sought out Hazelton, full of a sense of apology. He found him gazing morosely into his glass of absinthe like one seeing unpleasant visions.

"It is really too strong," Raoul said. "I am sorry."

"It's not your fault," Hazelton replied, listlessly. "It's got to stop, though!" He did not look up, but he felt the shock that traveled through De Vilmarte's well-knit body. "It's got to stop!" he repeated. "It's too strong, as you say."

There was a long silence, a silence full of gravity, full of despair, the silence of a man who has suddenly and unexpectedly heard his death sentence, a silence in whose duration De Vilmarte saw his life as it was. He had begun this as a joke, after his first agonized indecision, and now suddenly he saw not only his mother but himself involved, and the honor of his name. He waited for Hazelton to say something—anything, but Hazelton was chasing chimeras in the depths of his pale drink. As usual, his resistance was the greater. He sat hunched and red, his black hair framing his truculent face, unmindful of Raoul.

"It has gone beyond a joke," was what Raoul finally said.

"That's just it," Hazelton agreed. "My God! Think

how they have hung you — think how they have hung me. Where do I get off? Have I got to work for nothing all my life?"

"The recognition — you know what that means — it means nothing!" cried Raoul.

Hazelton did not answer.

"But I can't — confess now!" Raoul's anguish dragged it out of him. "I could afford to be a *farceur* — I cannot afford to be a cheat."

Hazelton looked at him suddenly. Then he laughed. "Ha! ha! The little birds!" he said. "They stepped in the lime and they gummed up their little feet, didn't they?" He lifted up his own small foot, which was well shod in American shoes. "Poor little bird! Poor little gummed feet!" He laughed immoderately.

Disgust and shame had their will with Raoul.

Hazelton was enchanted with his own similes, and, unmindful of his friend's mood, he placed his small hand next Raoul's, which was nervous and brown, the hand of a horseman.

"Can you see the handcuffs linking us?" he chuckled. "'Linked for Life' or 'The Critics' Revenge.'" He laughed again, but there was bitterness in his mirth. "We should have told before," he muttered. "I suppose it is too late now. I cannot blame you or myself, but, by God! I'm not going to paint for you all my days. Why should I? We had better stop it, you know." He drank deeply. "Courage, my boy!" he cried, setting down his glass. "I will have the courage to starve my wife if you will have the courage to disappoint your mother."

They left it this way.

When De Vilmarte again entered Hazelton's studio, Hazelton barked at him ungraciously: "Ho! So you are back!"

"Yes," said Raoul, "I am back." He stood leaning upon his cane, very elegant, very correct, a hint of austerity about him that vanished charmingly under the sunshine of his smile.

Hazelton continued painting. "Well," he said, without turning around, "you have not come, I suppose, for

the pleasure of my company; but let me tell you in advance that I have no time to do any painting for you. I am not your *bonne à tout faire*."

By Hazelton's tone De Vilmarte realized that he was ready to capitulate; he wanted to be urged, and he desired to make it as disagreeable as he could because he was not in a position to send De Vilmarte to the devil any more than De Vilmarte could follow his instinct and leave Hazelton to come crawling to him—for there was always the chance that Hazelton might be lucky and would not come crawling.

"It's your mother again, I suppose," said Hazelton, ungraciously.

De Vilmarte grew white around his mouth; he grasped his cane until his hand was bloodless. "Some one unfortunately told her that they were urging me to have a private exhibition, and her heart is set upon it."

"There are a number of things upon which my wife's heart is set," Hazelton admitted after a pause, during which he painted with delicate deliberation and exquisite surety while, fascinated and full of envy, De Vilmarte watched the delicate hand that seemed to have an independent existence of its own that seemed to be the utterance of some other and different personality than that which was expressed in Hazelton's body. He turned around suddenly, grinning at De Vilmarte.

"How much are you going to pay for my soul this time?" he asked.

They had never bargained before. In the midst of it Hazelton stopped and looked De Vilmarte over from top to toe. No detail of his charm and of his correctness escaped him.

"How are you able to stand it?" he asked. "It must be hard on you, too." The thought came to him as something new.

"Oh," said Raoul, with awful sarcasm, "you think it is hard on me?"

"You must be fond of your mother," said Hazelton. This time he had not meant to be brutal, and he was sorry to see De Vilmarte wince, but he did not know how to mend matters. "How are we going to break through?"

he said. "What end is there for us? I do it for my wife, whom I don't love, poor wretch, but for whom I feel damned responsible; and you sell your soul to please your mother. And do you get nothing for yourself, I wonder—" He half closed his little eyes, which glinted like jewels between his black lashes. "Appreciation and applause must be pleasant. One can buy as much with stolen money as one can with money earned. . . . There is only one way out—it is for one of us to die, or for one of *them*. There is death in our little drama, *hein, mon vieux?*"

It was the private exhibition that fixed De Vilmarte's reputation as an artist. It also marked in his own mind the precariousness of his position. And now the matter was complicated for him because he fell in love with a young girl who cared for his talent as did his mother. She was one of those proud young daughters of France who had no interest in rich and idle young men. Each word of her praise was anguish to him. The praise of the *feuilletons* he could stand better, because some way they seemed to have nothing to do with him. It was the price which he paid willingly for his mother's happiness.

He cared so much that he had tried not to care for her, and again his mother intervened. It was in every way a suitable match, and his mother told him that she did not wish to die without a grandchild. "You have obligations to your art," she said, "but your obligations to your race are above those."

She was now very feeble. His wedding and his next *Salon* picture filled her mind. She was haunted by the presentiment that she would not see the summer come to its close.

So Raoul would hurry from her room to Hazelton to see how the picture was coming on. Hazelton was painting as he had never painted before. It seemed, indeed, as if he had a double personality, and as if each one of these personalities was trying to outstrip the other. As happens sometimes to an artist, he had made a sudden leap ahead. No picture that he had painted had the depth or the beauty or the clear, flowing color of this one. But

he lagged along. It was as though the beauty of the picture which De Vilmarte was to sign tortured him, and he did not wish to finish it. He would stand before it, lost in the contemplation of its excellences like a devotee, refusing to paint.

The picture Hazelton was painting for his own signature was dark and magnificent, but the picture which he was painting for De Vilmarte had a singular radiance. It was as though at last Hazelton had painted the impossible; light shone from that picture. Yet it was not finished. Days passed, and Hazelton had not brought the picture further toward completion.

One day when De Vilmarte came in he found Hazelton brooding before it. He had been drinking. Tears were in his eyes. "It is too beautiful—too beautiful! Light is more beautiful than darkness. The taste for the black, the menacing, is the decadent appreciation of a too sheltered world. I cannot finish this picture for another to sign."

"No," De Vilmarte soothed him, "of course not."

"Oh, my beautiful!" cried Hazelton, addressing his picture. "I cannot finish you! Come, De Vilmarte, we will drink."

De Vilmarte went with Hazelton. He watched over him as a mother over her child. He talked; he reasoned; he sat quiet, white-lipped, while Hazelton would speculate as to what De Vilmarte got out of it.

"You are, I think, like the victim of a drug," he said, jeering at De Vilmarte, his brilliant eyes a gleam. That was truer than Hazelton knew. He could not stop. His mother, his fiancée, his friends, the critics, his world, expected a picture from him. He visualized them sometimes pushing him on to some doom of whose exact nature he was ignorant. Again it was to him as though they dug a dark channel in which his life had to flow.

Meantime he had to nurse Hazelton's sick spirit along. He would go with him as he drank, stand by him in his studio, urging him to paint. In this way they spent hideous days together.

Hazelton developed a passion for torture. He was tortured himself. Alcohol tortured him, his embittered na-

ture tortured him. He loved to see De Vilmarte writhe. He was torn between his desire to finish the picture and the anguish which he felt at seeing it about to pass into another's hands. There were days when its existence hung in the balance.

"You see this palette-knife," he would tell De Vilmarte, "and this palette of dark paint? A twist, my friend, a little twist of the knife and a little splash, and where is this luminous radiance? Gone!" And he would watch De Vilmarte as he let his brush hover over the brilliant surface.

How it hurt Raoul he knew, because when he thought of destroying the picture it was as though a knife were twisted in his own heart.

One afternoon De Vilmarte nursed Hazelton from café to café, listening to his noble braggadocio.

"Remember," Hazelton urged Raoul, "the wonderful Mongolian legend of the father and son who loved the same woman, and whom for their honor they threw over a cliff! That's the idea—the cliff! You shall throw our love over the cliff—you shall destroy the picture yourself. Come back with me!" He was as though possessed. Full of apprehension, De Vilmarte followed him.

They stood before the picture. It shone out as though indeed light came from it. Hazelton put the palette into De Vilmarte's hand.

"Now, my friend, go to it!" he cried. "Paint, De Vilmarte—paint in your own natural manner! A few strokes of the brush of the great master De Vilmarte, and color and light will vanish from it. Why not—why not? You suffer, too—your face is drawn. You think I do not know how you hate me. I don't need to look at you to know that. We always hate those who have power over us. Paint—paint! If I can bear it, surely you can. *Paint naturally*, De Vilmarte! Paint into it your own meagerness and banality! Paint into my masterpiece the signature of your own defeat."

The afternoon was ebbing. It seemed as though the room were full of silent people, all holding Raoul back—his world, the critics, his fiancée, his mother. Besides,

he had no right to destroy this beautiful thing to save his honor.

"You are not yourself," he said.

"Aha! I know what you think of me. Ha! De Vilmar-te, but I am a master, a great painter. Paint, and betray yourself. Ha! *sale voyou*, you will not? You are waiting to steal from me my final beautiful expression. You stand there— How is it that you permit me to call the Vicomte de la Tour de Vilmar-te names? Why do you not strike me?"

"Oh, call me what you like," Raoul cried. "Only finish the picture. There is very little more to do."

"I tell you what I shall call you," Hazelton jeered at him. "I will call you nothing worse than Raoul—Ra-oul—Ra—o—u—l!" He meowed it like a tom-cat. "How can I be so vile when I paint like an angel, Ra—o—u—l . . . Ra—o—u—l!"

Sweat stood on Raoul's forehead. He stood quiet. The picture was finished.

"Sign, my little Raoul, sign!" cried Hazelton. And with murder in his heart, a bitter tide of dark and sluggish blood mounting, ever mounting, Raoul signed and then fled into the lovely spring evening.

"This is the end," he thought. "There shall be no more of this. Not for any one—not for any one, can I be so defiled!" For he felt the mystic identity between himself and his mother—that he was flesh of her flesh, and that in some vicarious way she was being insulted through him.

But it was not the end. It was with horror that Raoul learned that the picture had been bought by the state, that he was to receive the Legion of Honor. His mother was wild with joy.

"Now," she cried, embracing him—"now I can depart in peace." She looked so fragile that it seemed as if indeed her spirit had lingered only for this joy. She looked at him narrowly. "But you have been working too hard—you look ill. A long rest is what you need."

"A very long rest," Raoul agreed. He left the house, and, as if it was a magnet, the great exhibition drew him to it, and in front of his picture stood the thick, familiar

figure of Hazelton, his nose jutting out truculently from his face, which was red and black like a poster. He broke through his attitude of devoted contemplation to turn upon Raoul.

"Bought by the state!" he cried. "To be hung in the Luxembourg!" He pointed menacingly with his cane at De Vilmarte's neat little signature. "Why, I ask, should I go to my grave unknown, poor, a pensioner of your bounty? Why should you be happy — *fêted*?"

The irony of being accused of happiness was too much for De Vilmarte. He laughed aloud.

"Would n't it be better for you to be an honest man?" croaked Hazelton.

"Only death can make an honest man of me," answered De Vilmarte.

"My death could make an honest man of you," Hazelton said slowly. It was as if he had read the dark and nameless secret that was lurking in the bottom of De Vilmarte's heart.

For a moment they two seemed alone in all the earth, the only living beings. They stood alone, their secret in their hands.

Then Hazelton's lips began to move. "My God!" he said. "Bought by the state and hung in the Luxembourg! Bought by the state and hung in the Luxembourg!" He repeated it as if trying to familiarize himself with some inexplicable fact. "I will not have it!" he went on. "I will not have it! If I'm not bought by the state I shall not go on!"

Raoul looked at him with entreaty. Hazelton came up to the surface of consciousness and his eyes followed Raoul's. A very frail little old lady was being pushed in a wheel-chair near them.

"My mother," Raoul whispered.

"I wish to meet her," said Hazelton.

She bowed graciously and then sat in her chair gazing at the picture bought by the state. Pride was in every line of her old face. She seemed returned from the shadows only to gaze at this picture. Then, in a voice which was cracked with age, she said, turning to Hazelton:

"I know your work, too, Monsieur — the opposite of

my son's. It is as though between you you encompassed all of nature's moods. To me there has always been — you will laugh I know — a strange similarity, as though you were two halves of a whole, as day and night."

A cold wave flowed over Hazelton, a feeling as though his hair were lifting on the back of his head. It was as though this frail old lady was linking him irrevocably to Raoul. He was powerless now to take his own.

"Madame," he said, "I feel as if no one had understood my work before."

But she had turned to gaze upon her son's painting. A sort of senility enveloped her, and his drunkenness reached out to it. His gaze had in it respect and tenderness and abnegation. His manner, more eloquent than words, said: "I give up; I resign. Take it."

He went to the end of the gallery, and Raoul saw him sit down in the attitude of one who waits. When Mme. de Vilmarte left, Raoul joined him.

Hazelton's head sank deeply between his shoulders; his pugnacity had oozed away. After a time he spoke with an effort. "I understand," he said. "I understand —"

A curious sense of liberation seized De Vilmarte. His old liking for Hazelton returned. "I am sorry for all of us," he said.

"My poor friend, there is no way out," said Hazelton. "I am vile — a beast. But trust me — believe in me."

"I will," cried De Vilmarte, deeply touched.

Hazelton's little jewel-like eyes were blurred with unwonted sentiment. "I am a king in exile," he muttered over and over. "A king in exile," he repeated. This sentimental simile seemed to be a well of bitter comfort for him.

This story should end here, for stories should end like this, on the high note; but life is different. Hazelton was a man with a bad liver, and he got no joy from his sacrifice. Moreover, in real life one seldom fights a decisive battle with one's lower nature. One goes on fighting; it dies hard when it dies at all. There are the high moments when one thinks the battle won, and the next day the enemy attacks again, with the battle to be fought over.

Hazelton had formed the habit of cursing fate and De Vilmarte, and, to revenge himself, of threatening De Vilmarte's exposure, and he continued to do these things. And De Vilmarte let his mind stray far in contemplating Hazelton's possible vileness, and in doing this he himself became vile. What he could not recognize was the definite place where Hazelton's vileness stopped. His life was like a fair fruit rotten within.

It was the summer of 1914, and Hazelton, whose drunkenness before had been occasional, now drank always, and forever in the background of De Vilmarte's mind was this powerful figure with its red face and black hair and truculent bearing, drunken and obscene, who carried in his careless hand the honor of the De Vilmartes. At any moment Hazelton could rob Raoul of his pride, embitter his mother's last hours, and make him the laughing stock of his world. Raoul became like an entrapped animal running around and around the implacable barriers of a cage. It is a terrible thing to have one's honor in the hands of another.

He thought of everything that might end this torment, and he found no answer. Madness grew in him. Wherever Raoul de la Tour de Vilmarte went, there followed him unseen a shadow, swart, dark, and red-faced. It followed him, mouthing, "Ra-o-u-l—Ra-o-u-l!" like a cat. "Ra-o-u-l! Ra-o-u-l!" from morning till night. When De Vilmarte was at a table in a café a huge and mocking shadow sat beside him, and it said, wagging its head in a horrid fashion, "There's death in our little drama, *hein, mon vieux?*"

The fate that had made their interests one, bound them together. They sought each other out to spend strange and tortured hours in each other's company, while in the depths of Raoul's heart a plan to end the torture was coming to its own slow maturity, and grew large and dark during the hot days of July. He could not continue to live. The burden of his secret weighed him down. Nor could he leave Hazelton behind him, the honor of the De Vilmartes in his hands.

The bloody answer to the riddle leaped out at him. Hazelton's death—that was the answer. Then De Vil-

marte could depart in peace. For two mad, happy days he saw life simply. First Hazelton, then himself.

One day he stopped short, for he realized he could not go until his mother—went. He must stay a while—until she died.

He had to wait until she died. He watched her, wondering if his endurance would outlast her life. He tried not to let her see him watching—for he knew there was madness in his eyes—and he would go out to find his dark shadow, for often it was less painful to be with him than away from him—he knew then what Hazelton was up to. He spent days in retracing the steps which had brought him to this desperate *impasse*. They had been easy, but he knew that weakness was at the bottom of it—perhaps, unless he did it now, he would never do it—perhaps an unworthy desire for life—and love—might hold back his hand.

So De Vilmarte lived his days and nights bound on the torturing pendulum of conflict.

Suddenly Europe was aflame. France stood still and waited. And as he waited, with Europe, Raoul for a moment forgot his torment. War is a great destroyer, but among other things it destroys the smaller emotions. Its licking flame shrivels up personal loves and hates. When war was declared, old hates were blotted out, and hopeless lovers trembling on the brink of suicide were cured overnight. Small human atoms were drowned in the larger hate and the larger love. Men ceased to have power over their own lives since their lives belonged to France.

So when war was declared, choice was taken from Raoul's hands. A high feeling of liberation possessed him. He walked along the street, and suddenly he realized that instead of going toward his home he was seeking his other half, the dark shadow to whom he had been so bound.

On Hazelton's door a note was pinned, addressed to him.

"My friend," it said, "you have luck! You will have your regiment, while nothing better than the ambulance,

like a *sale embusque*, for me. If harm comes to you, don't fear for your mother."

This letter made him feel as though Hazelton had clasped his hand. He no longer felt toward Hazelton as an enemy, since France had also claimed him.

Madness had brushed him with its dark wings. By so slender a thread his life and Hazelton's had hung! Yes — and his honor!

"Thank God!" he said, "for an honorable death!" It was the last personal thought that was his for a long time. War engulfed him. Instead of an individual he was a soldier of France, and his life was broken away from the old life which now seemed illusion, the days which streamed past him like pennants torn in the wind.

Later, in the monotony of trench warfare, he had time to think of Hazelton. He desired two things — to serve France, and to see Hazelton. Raoul wanted a word of friendship to pass between them, and especially he wanted to tell Hazelton that he need not worry about his wife. He wrote to him, but got no answer. Life went on; war had become the normal thing. The complexities of his former life receded further and further from him, and became more phantasmal, but the desire to see Hazelton before either of them should die remained with Raoul.

When he was wounded it was his last conscious thought before oblivion engulfed him. There followed a half-waking — pain — a penumbral land through which shapes moved vaguely; the smell of an anesthetic, an awakening, and again sleep. When he wakened fully he was in a white hospital ward with a sister bending over him.

"In the next bed," she said, "there is a *grand blessé*." She looked at him significantly. "He wishes to speak to you — he is a friend of yours."

In the next bed lay Hazelton, the startling black of his shaggy hair framing the pallor of his face.

With difficulty Raoul raised his head. They smiled at each other. From the communion of their silence came Hazelton's deep voice.

"Why the devil," he said, "did we ever hate each other?"

Raoul shook his head. He did n't know. He, too, had wanted to ask Hazelton this.

"It has bothered me," said Hazelton. "I wanted to see you —" His voice trailed off. "I've wanted to ask you why we have needed this war — death — to make us know we don't hate each other."

"I don't know," said De VilmarTE. It was an effort for him to speak; his voice sounded frail and broken.

"Raoul," Hazelton asked, tenderly, "where are you wounded? Is it bad?"

"I don't know," Raoul answered again.

"It's his head," the sister answered for him, "and his right hand."

Hazelton raised his great head; a red mounted to his face; his old sardonic laughter boomed out through the ward. With a sharply indrawn breath of pain: "Oh, la — la!" he shouted. "*'Cré nom! 'Cré nom!* What luck — imperishable! I'm dying — your right hand — your *right* hand!" He sank back, his ironic laughter drowned in a swift crimson tide.

The nurse beckoned to an orderly to bring a screen. . . .

Tears of grief and weakness streamed down Raoul's face. To the last his ill luck had held. He had n't been able to make his friend understand, or to make amends. His right hand was wounded, and he could no longer serve France.

The sister looked at him with pity. She tried to console him.

"Death is not always so mercifully quick with these strong men," she said.